

## Preface

The stories selected for this collection are grouped under four headings: Mystery, Horror and Fear, the Psychological, and the Humorous.

Stories of Mystery open the collection. In these stories Poe displays his interest in studying, solving, and even inventing, problems. He enjoyed using his mind to clear up a mystery, to break a code, or to solve a crime. Poe's French detective, Dupin, appears in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter." These are first-class detective stories. They, like "The Gold Bug" are also stories of analysis. Poe called them tales of *ratiocination*, or stories of logical reasoning. Dupin solves crimes, and Legrand breaks a code, by using the power of reasoning.

Stories of Horror and Fear deal with death, revenge, and cruelty. These are among Poe's favorite subjects, used by him again and again. Tales such as "The Black Cat" and "The Cask of Amontillado" create atmosphere, which Poe felt was even more important than creating character. "A Descent Into the Maelstrom" and "The Pit and the Pendulum" are horror stories. The first deals with the horrors of nature. The second deals with the horrors used by people to torture their enemies.

The Psychological Stories probe beneath the surface of a person's mind, character, and personality. "William Wilson" is especially interesting because it deals with what is known as a double, or dual, personality. Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* deals with a similar theme.

The Humorous Stories reveal a side of Poe that is not always remembered. Poe was a strange, unhappy personality. He often seemed to be as strange as any character he ever created. But he had a sense of humor all his own. It was as original and as far removed from the usual as his sense of beauty and mystery. This side of him is shown in several

stories in this collection, including "Never Bet the Devil Your Head."

As a poet, Poe was mainly interested in the sounds of words and word combinations. The themes of his poetry include love, beauty, death, and romance. All of his poems are purposely short. Poe believed that there was no such thing as a long poem. He even went so far as to say that a long poem was simply several short poems with bad or weak spots between the good ones. Some of his most famous poems, including "The Raven" which brought him his first big success, are included in this collection.

This book, then, contains some of the stories and poems that have made Edgar Allan Poe a world figure and that have given pleasure to readers for almost 150 years.

## Adapter's Note

In preparing this edition of AN EDGAR ALLAN POE READER, we have kept the author's main purpose in mind. However, language has changed since the stories and poems were originally published. We have modified or omitted some passages and vocabulary in the stories. We have, however, kept as much of the original language as possible.